



Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts

Thom S. Rainer , Sam S. Rainer III

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Why do so many young adults (18 to 22) leave the church, and what will it take to bring them back? This important question is examined and duly answered in *Essential Church?*, a follow-up to Thom S. Rainer's best-selling *Simple Church* cowritten this time with his son, research expert Sam Rainer.

The book is based on a study of one-thousand so-called "church dropouts" who were interviewed about why they left. Their answers are quite surprising, having less to do with "losing their religion" and more about the desire for a community that isn't made stale by simply maintaining the status quo.

In turn, the Rainers offer churches four concrete solutions toward making their worship community an essential part these young people's lives again:

Simplify - develop a clear structure and process for making disciples.

Deepen - provide strong biblical teaching and preaching.

Expect - let members know the need for commitment to the congregation.

Multiply - emphasize evangelism, outward focus, and starting new churches.

Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts Details

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From Reader Review Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts for online ebook

Ron says

This book deals with the fact that most 18 to 22 year olds are dropping out of church and why they are. The authors did a study and go through the results with 4 major points:

Simplify the church structure

Deepen your knowledge of the Bible

Expect more of your members

Multiply - a discussion around evangelism of both people who walked away and people who were never in church

Jonathan Brooker says

Confession: I am incredibly fed up with reading books that are simply written to let Christian leaders know that we're all failing miserably and if we don't fix it all real quickly we're going to have no American church in like...20 years!

Fortunately, having read the author's previous book, "Simple Church," I knew that this was likely not going to be like that. Yes, it does talk about the exodus of young adults in many modern churches. And yes, it did bother me when they claimed at the end that the American church was dying - I wish they could find better verbiage for what's occurring. But the loss of 2/3 of young adults from our churches isn't a new statistic, nor is it one that we've done well at changing over the last few decades. So it's wise to listen up to this book to see what marks churches that 18-22 year-olds leave (so you don't model that), what marks churches that retain that age group (so you can see that it's possible and how to do it), and what marks churches that engage the dechurched so that they become rechurched (because someone needs to care for the many ex-church brats out there!).

The Rainers present some great statistics and research on what is really behind the loss of students after they graduate high school. Frankly, some of it is likely to surprise you because it's not always what you think! And some of what you may think would certainly be the keys to keeping that age group are negligible aspects in their findings of what actually worked. So I'd say it's definitely worth the read for church leaders who would like help on closing the back door and keeping this critical age group involved.

I wish they would have shortened the book and been a lot less repetitive, though. And I wish they would've paid a bit more attention to their introductions, conclusions and summations. They often felt underdeveloped or just not there.

Other than that, it's a good read! And as far as books about the dying church and what to do about it, this is one of the better ones!

Allen says

Based on extensive research, the authors present both the need (large back door to the church especially

among 18-23 year olds) and solutions. The book is filled with testimonies of those that left the church, those that stayed, and those that returned. Without presenting a cookie cutter plan, they offer solid suggestions to help close the back door and reclaim those who have left.

Dale Critchley says

Brilliant. A must-read for every church leader.

John Semchenko says

People are not Unchurched, in many cases they are DEcured

Deslynne says

A easy read, with good insight on the dropout youth, church and simple church. More recently the idea of Simple church has resonated with me on an unconscious level, but this book has confirmed its relevance for emerging adults who dropout of church, and church in general. A keepsake and one for youth ministry professionals.

Marc Minter says

Decent conclusions, poor foundations

These two authors provide many biblically faithful methods and activities for local churches. However, this book is loaded with pragmatism and typical (and aging, I might add) church growth philosophy. This book was so much like many others in this genre.

Pick up Brian Croft's "biblical church revitalization" or Andy Davis's "revitalize" for a much better use of your money.

Angie says

Very practical information for those churches that truly wish to make a difference and to be meaningful to the lives of their members.

Angela says

great - discusses why young people are leaving the church and what to do about it

Eric Hoff says

Decent read. Not earth shattering, but ok.

Jeff Noble says

Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts by Thom S. Rainer/ Sam S. Rainer (?)

Stacey says

I found this book to be poorly written and weakly documented. The research methods involved in this book were not entirely clear, but it seems the authors primarily relied on surveys of a small pool (1000 "church dropouts"), with no indication of how this pool was selected. Though Rainer and Rainer repeatedly hammer home the results of this survey (the top ten reasons young adults leave church), I am unconvinced.

This is not to say I found nothing good in this book (which was required reading for a Doctor of Ministry course). The authors made four points I found compelling (possibly because they confirm what I already believe): 1 - young adults begin the drift away from church while they are still youth, starting around age 16; 2 - the role of the pastor in retaining youth and young adults is key; 3 – one of the most critical ways the pastor connects with youth and young adults is through the sermon; 4 – relationships with other adults in the congregation is also hugely important.

The second half of the book focuses on how to retain young adults - churches need to simplify their structure, deepen their content, raise their expectations (of young adults), and focus beyond their own fellowship. None of this is earth-shattering information, and all of it is said better elsewhere.

For those truly interested in getting a better feel for what's going on with youth and young adults outside the church, I would recommend *unChristian* by David Kinnaman and *Tribal Church* by Carol Howard Merritt.

Joshua says

I love pretty much anything by Thom Rainer

Mark says

Great thoughts about why the 18-30 year olds are leaving or have left churches

Joey Reed says

Church has become a collection of issues and opinions. Disagreements alienate so many people in the church. And it seems like the younger generations are being alienated at astounding rates. I found this book to be dead on in the assessment of the problems facing the church.

The book is based on a study of one-thousand so-called "church dropouts" who were interviewed about why they left. Their answers are quite surprising, having less to do with "losing their religion" and more about the desire for a community that isn't made stale by simply maintaining the status quo.

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Expect - let members know the need for commitment to the congregation.

Multiply - make room for new people to experience the new paradigm.
